NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5994 JULY 13, 1978
JOHN ROBERTS/KHARTOUM

LIBERATION GROUPS -- THE SEARCH FOR LEGITIMACY

ANNCR:

AS AFRICAN FOREIGN MINISTERS IN KHARTOUM CONTINUE TO PREPARE FOR THE COMING HEADS OF STATE CONFERENCE, THERE IS MUCH THAT GOES ON BEHIND THE SCENES - AND ONE SUCH ACTIVITY IS THE EFFORTS BY VARIOUS AFRICAN LIBERATION GROUPS TO GAIN ACCEPTANCE BY THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY. VOA'S JOHN ROBERTS HAS DETAILS IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM KHARTOUM.

VOICE:

IT HAPPENS EVERY YEAR. EACH OAU SUMMIT, PRECEEDED BY A FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING, FINDS ITSELF CAUGHT UP IN AN ISSUE IT WOULD PREFER TO AVOID -- WHAT TO DO WITH THE WIDE ASSORTMENT OF LIBERATION ORGANIZATIONS WHICH COME KNOCKING AT THE DOOR OF THE OAU, BEGGING TO BE LEFT IN.

THE OAU ONLY RECOGNIZES LIBERATION GROUPS WHICH ARE INVOLVED IN OPPOSING WHITE RULE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. PEOPLES ORGANIZATION AND TWO SOUTH AFRICAN GROUPS -- THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS AND THE PAN AFRICAN CONGRESS. THE OAU IS NOT REALLY INTERESTED IN MOVEMENTS WHICH SEEK THE OVERTHROW OF ESTABLISHED MEMBERS OF THE ORGANIZATION, OR WHOSE EFFORTS ARE DIRECTED TOWARD INTERNAL DIVISION, NO MATTER HOW MUCH SYMPATHY MAY EXIST FOR ITS CAUSE AMONG SOME MEMBERS.

FOR THIS REASON, THE WESTERN SOMALI LIBERATION FRONT (WSLF) HAS NEVER GOTTEN VERY FAR WITH THE OAU, NOR HAS THE GROUP SEEKING SELF-DETERMINATION IN THE WESTERN SAHARA, POLISARIO, OR THE FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF CHAD, FROLINAT, ALTHOUGH THEY ENJOY THE BACKING OF ALGERIA AND LIBYA.

THIS YEAR, FOLLOWING THE DEFEAT OF THE SOMALI GUERRILLAS IN THE OGADEN DESERT OF ETHIOPIA, THE WSLF HAS NOT TRIED TO COME TO KHARTOUM. BUT POLISARIO DID TRY, WITH THE PRESUMED ENCOURAGEMENT OF ALGERIA, AND WAS REFUSED ENTRY TO SUDAN.

ANOTHER ISSUE, WHICH COMES AS REGULARLY AS THE ANNUAL RAINY SEASON, IS THE CANARY ISLANDS LIBERATION GROUPS, CALLED MPAIAC. THE CANARY ISLANDS ARE OWNED BY SPAIN AND THE SOME OAU MEMBERS THIS QUALIFIES THE GROUP AS A LEGITIMATE ANTI-COLONIAL MOVEMENT. BUT TO OTHERS THERE IS A REAL QUESTION WHETHER THE CANARIES CAN PROPERLY BE CONSIDERED PART OF AFRICA, EVEN THOUGH THE OAU HAS ESTABLISHED THE PRINCIPLE THAT ISLANDS OFF THE AFRICAN COAST ARE PART OF THE CONTINENT. ONCE AGAIN THE ISSUE OF THE CANARIES HAS BEEN PASSED ALONG TO THE HEADS OF STATE WHO ARE LIKELY TO KILL THE ISSUE BY ASSIGNING IT TO A COMMITTEE.

ALSO IN THE BACKGROUND ARE THE ERITREAN LIBERATIONS GROUPS, THE ELF AND THE EPLF -- AND NOW THERE IS A NEW ONE, CALLED THE TIGRE LIBERATION FRONT, OR THE TPLF. TIGRE IS A PROVINCE OF ETHIOPIA JUST TO THE SOUTH OF ERITREA, WHICH HAS BEEN AT ODDS WITH THE GOVERNMENT IN ADDIS ABABA SINCE NINETEEN FORTY THREE.

BUT PERHAPS THE STRANGEST SITUATION REVOLVES AROUND THE INDIAN OCEAN ISLAND OF REUNION, WHICH IS A FRENCH PROTECTORATE. IN THE EYES OF THE OAU, THIS IS A CLEAR CASE FOR THE DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE. THE FOREIGN MINISTERS DID BRIEFLY EXAMINE THE ISSUE, BUT CONCLUDED THEY COULD NOT DO ANYTHING BECAUSE THERE DOES NOT SEEM TO BE ANY LIBERATION ORGANIZATION FROM REUNION FOR THE OAU TO BACK.

JS/PY